



## Wolf Management in Utah

### *Court ruling returns wolves to the Endangered Species List*

For many years, northern Rocky Mountain gray wolves were classified as an endangered species and fully protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Then, in 2009, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) delisted wolves, officially removing them from the Endangered Species List in parts of western states, including a small portion of Utah.

In August 2010, U.S. District Judge Donald Molloy overturned the delisting and put wolves back on the Endangered Species List. Once again, wolves are classified as endangered — and beyond state control — across the West.



*In 2009, population estimates indicated that at least 1,700 wolves live in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.*

### **Proposed legislation and requests for state management**

After Judge Molloy's ruling, congressional lawmakers proposed federal legislation (S. 249 and H.R. 509) to remove gray wolves from the protection of the ESA. If these bills pass, wolves could be delisted in many western states. Right now, however, not all versions of the legislation identify Utah as an area where delisting should occur. Until Congress debates and finalizes these bills, there is no way to know how or whether they will affect the status of wolves in Utah.

In October 2010, the Utah Wildlife Board sent a letter to Utah's congressional delegation, expressing its unanimous support for the proposed legislation delisting wolves in Utah. You can see a copy of the board's letter online at [wildlife.utah.gov/wolf/pdf/board-wolf-letter.pdf](http://wildlife.utah.gov/wolf/pdf/board-wolf-letter.pdf).

In January 2011, the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA) passed a resolution stating that it “supports and endorses immediate delisting of gray wolves in the WAFWA member states.” The resolution concluded by urging that “this species be managed by the respective State wildlife agencies.”

## Management challenges

Utah’s Division of Wildlife Resources (DWR) recognizes that unmanaged wolf populations may pose a serious threat to our wildlife. In nearby states — including Idaho, Montana and Wyoming — wildlife officials attribute declines in their elk herds to the unchecked growth of wolf packs. The DWR wants to prevent a similar situation from occurring in Utah.

The Utah Legislature is also keenly aware of this threat and passed S.B. 36, *Wolf Management Act*, in 2010. In compliance with this law, the DWR has notified the USFWS of confirmed wolf sightings over the past year and has requested that the USFWS remove individual wolves. The USFWS has declined, stating that it will not remove wolves unless livestock depredation meets its criteria for removal.

Although there are no established wolf packs in Utah, the DWR has a detailed plan and the personnel necessary to manage wolves.

## The Utah wolf management plan

In 2003, the Utah Legislature directed the DWR to prepare a wolf management plan. The DWR convened a diverse team with members from many interest groups. Everyone collaborated to draft an effective plan.

In 2005, after an exhaustive public process, the Utah Wildlife Board approved the management plan. Shortly thereafter, the DWR submitted the plan to the USFWS for review and comment. Then, in 2007, the DWR formally resubmitted the plan to the USFWS for approval. To date, the USFWS has failed to approve or otherwise comment on the plan, despite several formal requests to do so. You can review the Utah Wolf Management Plan in its entirety at [wildlife.utah.gov/wolf](http://wildlife.utah.gov/wolf).

## The DWR’s position

The DWR’s position has always been that wolves should be removed from the protection of the ESA and managed by the state of Utah. DWR leadership, the governor’s office and Utah’s congressional delegation have repeatedly requested that the federal government transfer management to the state.

The DWR will continue to urge the USFWS to delist wolves statewide. After that occurs, the DWR can implement its plan and manage wolves responsibly whenever — and wherever — they enter Utah. However, while wolves remain listed as endangered, the DWR does not have authority to manage them, regardless of their impact on livestock or wildlife.

Published — February 7, 2011